

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**For More Information Contact**

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**HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL OFFICIALS INVESTIGATE  
FISH KILLS AND ALGAL BLOOM IN EASTERN VIRGINIA**

(Richmond, Va.)— Members of the Virginia Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Task Force are working together to determine the cause of fish kills in the Poquoson River, the Southwest branch of the Back River, and Queen Creek, a tributary of the York River. There have also been reports of a fish kill in the East River.

Discolored, reddish water was also noted in the York River near the mouth of Taskinas Creek last Friday, indicating algal bloom activity. The Friday water samples from this area showed relatively high concentrations of *Pfiesteria shumwayae*. However, as of Wednesday, March 30, the reddish hue in the York River was reported to have disappeared. Test results from yesterday's water samples are pending. Water samples taken from the other tributaries have detected little or no concentrations of *Pfiesteria*. Samples from the East River are being analyzed.

"Although algae are a natural and critical part of the coastal ecosystem, certain algal blooms can be harmful to humans and animals," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

Health and environmental officials, as well as other members of the HAB Task Force continue to monitor the situation.

Algae are microscopic organisms that produce oxygen and food for many of the animals that live in coastal waters. When environmental conditions are favorable, these cells may multiply rapidly, resulting in an algal bloom. Most algal blooms are not harmful, but some do affect fish and humans, as well as other animals like birds and marine mammals. People should take the following precautions to avoid exposure to harmful algal blooms and fish kills:

- Do not swim in or drink water from areas where an algal bloom has been identified, even if the water looks clear.
- Keep pets and livestock away from bloom areas. Algal blooms may contain a toxin harmful to pets and livestock, although these effects have not been found in association with *Pfiesteria*.
- Internal organs (innards) of fish and crabs caught in bloom waters should not be eaten. After cleaning fish taken from affected waters, thoroughly wash any skin that has come into contact with the fish.

If any member of the public has been on the York River in the vicinity of Taskinas Creek recently and witnessed or has information about the bloom, please call the VDH HAB hotline at (888) 238-6154.

For more information about harmful algal blooms, log onto:

[http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/whc/external\\_whc/HarmfulAlgalBloomsExternal%20Web.asp](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/whc/external_whc/HarmfulAlgalBloomsExternal%20Web.asp)

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